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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [ASEC](#) [GG](#) [RU](#)
SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA'S NOVEMBER 11 AND 14 MEETINGS WITH IMEDI
MEDIA LEADERSHIP AND JOURNALISTS

REF: A. TBILISI 2792

- [1](#)B. TBILISI 2752
- [1](#)C. TBILISI 2729
- [1](#)D. TBILISI 2719

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, reason 1.4 (b), and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) (Summary) During his visit to Tbilisi DAS Bryza held three meetings with the management and journalists of Imedi television. On November 11, Lewis Robertson, CEO Newscorp Caucasus and Imedi General Manager; Bidzina Baratashvili, Imedi General Director; and Irakli Rukhadze, Manager of Selford Holdings and Badri Patarkatsishvili, s representative in Georgia, met with EUR DAS Matt Bryza. Bryza listened to details of the November 7 raid on Imedi television and its subsequent shutdown, and expressed USG concerns and the State Department, s call for the State of Emergency to be immediately ended and for all media broadcasting to be resumed. Robertson responded that they could resume limited broadcasting within 6 hours and that they could accept some sort of independent monitoring of journalistic ethical standards as long as there were no government restrictions on how to cover the news. In later meetings on November 15 with Imedi journalists and with Baratashvili and in a phone conversation with Robertson DAS Bryza discussed in greater detail his suggestion that a journalistic code of ethics be developed by Georgian journalists and that a European Media ombudsman should be named to oversee adherence to that code of ethics. The Imedi journalists expressed concerns about censorship, but welcomed details of such a system, including Bryza, s clarification this would not constitute censorship. The journalists wanted to discuss it further with Newscorp superiors. Baratashvili, who had earlier suggested the need for such a system, mentioned that he had already been discussing the details with an influential Georgian newspaper editor, and expressed a willingness to find a way to make it work. (End Summary).

NEW DETAILS OF NOVEMBER 7 AT IMEDI

[1](#)2. (C) November 11, Baratashvili told Bryza there were at least five groups of Special Forces at Imedi on the night of November 7. "Each group seemed to act quite differently and to have its own orders," he said. Baratashvili said that some police were quite professional, especially the regular police, others wore blue jeans and did not appear to be police at all. In spite of repeated requests, Imedi staff were never shown a warrant or court order for the raid. Baratashvili said that he and others had guns held to their foreheads. The Imedi representatives said there was extensive destruction of equipment during the raid, and that film and programming archives were destroyed. They also said there was wide-spread vandalism and looting by security forces. The Imedi cafeteria was completely looted, and security forces were seen carting off cases of water. Some

employee,s cars in the Imedi parking lot had windows broken and car stereos stolen. Baratashvili said his jacket and his personal cell phone were stolen. Desk drawers were emptied and it is presumed that many items are now missing. Baratashvili said he saw one member of the Security Forces not wearing a ski mask who appeared to be on drugs. Ambassador Tefft requested that they write down a full description of the events at Imedi for inclusion in the next Human Rights report.

ON THE SAME DAY, AT PATARKATSISHVILI,S AMUSEMENT PARK

13. (C) Rukhadze, Manager of Selford Holdings and Badri Patarkatsishvili,s representative in Georgia and a naturalized American citizen, said that Badri Patarkatsishvili has two primary holdings in Georgia: Imedi and the Mtatsminda amusement park in Tbilisi. At 11:00 am on November 7 the amusement park was stormed by Police who took possession of the park and evicted its employees. According to Rukhadze, this also was done without presenting any legal papers. He later heard on Rustavi 2 television that the Mayor,s office said the park was seized for not having paid a leasing fee to the City, but according to Rukhadze, this fee is not due until November 17, and even if not paid the government would not have the right to "storm the park."

LATER EVENTS AT IMEDI

14. (C) Up to the November 11 meeting with Bryza, Imedi officials still had not been informed of a legal justification for the raid. According to Baratashvili, they learned from a New York Times interview with MP Giga Bokeria that there was an investigation against Imedi. "Do we have

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to read the New York Times to find out what is happening to our company," Baratashvili asked. He has requested information from the government about the status of the Imedi broadcasting license and was informed by MP Bokeria that there was a lien on their property, and that there will be criminal charges. Rukhadze observed that "a lien is a legal document, and must be legally prepared, but we have still seen nothing." No Imedi employees have been allowed to return to Imedi to assess damages and see what needs to be repaired. EU Representative Peter Semneby,s tour of Imedi premises early on November 11 was broadcast by Public Television, the only channel currently allowed to broadcast news. The Imedi management said they were surprised to see that there was no visible damage to the station, and that it was perfectly clean. Baratashvili observed, "Frankly, the station has never been that clean. We should hire the government staff who did this to clean the station for us." He alleged that this clean-up was proof that the government was trying to cover up their actions at Imedi.

WHEN CAN IMEDI RETURN?

15. (C) According to Robertson, CEO Newscorp Caucasus and Imedi General Manager, Imedi could return to the air in a limited way, and perhaps only via satellite, within six hours. Rukhadze said that since most Georgian viewers do not have satellite it would be essential to return Imedi to the regular broadcast airwaves. This would require government support, and enough time to repair or replace damaged equipment. The lack of archives would seriously limit their normal programming.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

16. (C) Imedi representatives adamantly refused to acknowledge that there was any possible justification for the government,s concerns about Imedi or for the government,s

subsequent actions. Robertson said "Every morning I look at what we have shown the night before and I make sure that it is balanced." (NOTE Robertson does not speak Georgian or Russian.) When asked about Patarkatsishvili,s famous statement that he would spend every last tetri (penny) of his money to overthrow the government, the Imedi representatives said that the statement was taken out of context. Baratashvili said, "We are not here to defend Badri," and Rukhadze said, "Badri was calling for Evolution, not a Revolution." When asked why Patarkatsishvili,s statements and Okruashvili,s "crazy speech" were repeatedly played on Imedi, their response was that these stories were news, that people wanted to see them, and that everyone was watching them. They observed that all of the channels covered these items.

THE LEAD-UP TO NOVEMBER 7

17. (C) In response to a question on Imedi bias, Imedi representatives said the government has been boycotting Imedi television for more than two years, despite repeated offers to government representatives to appear on air. Since no one from the government would appear on Imedi, that left a vacuum that only the opposition filled. "Perhaps a structural bias was created, but it was created by the government and not by Imedi," Batarashvili said. Imedi representatives said that "things are a lot more complicated since Badri is running for President." Once they realized Patarkatsishvili,s political ambitions, they asked that he step aside from Imedi management. That was why Patarkatsishvili signed a limited power of attorney on October 31 granting Newscorp management rights over Imedi for 12 months. It is important to note that Patarkatsishvili retains full ownership of his stock. This agreement has been widely misreported on Imedi and in interviews by Robertson, and Patarkatsishvili, as the sale of all Imedi shares. In an October 31 press conference, Newscorp representative Robertson stated that "Mr. Patarkatsishvili will continue to be regularly consulted on the direction of Imedi."

MEETING THE WORKING JOURNALISTS

18. (C) On November 15 Imedi journalists told Bryza that they recognize the need for greater understanding of journalistic ethics by the Georgian media, and expressed their willingness to accept and abide by some sort of code of ethics and work under an ombudsman,s oversight so long as it was not censorship, and so long as all Georgian media were similarly scrutinized. They continued to be frankly partisan in their politics and quite skeptical of the President and the

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government,s actions and intentions. They stated that when Newscorp had begun overseeing Imedi they had hoped for training in ethics and standards, but they were never given any such training. During the week of the demonstration they stated that every day Robertson would come into their newsroom and applaud their unbiased reporting. The journalists gave Bryza a warm reception, even when he called out a producer for distorted reporting that falsely indicated the Georgian Government refused to compromise on any of the opposition,s demands. The journalists implored Bryza to continue working toward a compromise that would get Imedi back on the air.

GETTING EVERYONE TO YES

19. (C) On November 15 DAS Bryza met again with Imedi management. In that meeting he discussed some of the concrete details of a proposed media ombudsman. He mentioned that Adam Michnik, a noted Polish journalist and politician had been identified as a candidate for such a position. He stressed the independence of such an Ombudsman and that the EU would oversee the arrangement. Batarashvili stated that

though the final decision would have to be Newscorp,s, he felt that the proposal was fair and represented a system with which he and his staff could work. "We agree to have a balance, it is in our interest," he said. He stated that they would welcome greater attention to professional journalist ethics and standards. "We are not the slaves of Badri or Newscorp, we are professional journalists," he said.

When Bryza contacted Robertson, the latter stated that he would have to see the details of any proposal. He said Newscorp would not agree to any form of censorship. He was not familiar with the concept of a country-wide media ombudsman, but was willing to learn about it. In general he could not make any specific agreement without discussing the proposal with Newscorp leadership. It should be noted that the European Council in Georgia proposed a code of journalistic ethics in 2006, but that journalists objected to it as being a form of censorship and so it lapsed on July 1, 2007 without being approved. DAS Bryza observed that the GOG seemed willing to allow Imedi to return to the air under these circumstances, and was planning to put in place the media freedom ombudsman. He said Imedi,s only real decision would be whether to resume broadcasts once the GOG gave permission to do so.

110. (U) DAS Bryza has cleared this telegram.
TEFFT